

One Too Many Knocks at the Door

I.

I heard a bang and when I opened the door; I was greeted by the solemn face of yet another man in uniform. I've seen this face before. I knew one of my family members were dead. Now it was my duty to stand there, destined to fall apart as I waited for the words: *Ma'am, I'm sorry to be the one who informs you, but...* followed shortly thereafter by the image of the person whose seat at the dinner table would become empty this year at Thanksgiving.

II.

I can remember the first time my life was decimated by a knock at the door; it was back in 1961 and my mother had been washing the dishes. She scuttled to the front of the house beckoned by a stoic banging emanating from the door.

"Coming, coming!" she swooned, as the frill of her favorite housedress with a sunflower print ruffled behind her. A military officer stood, hands clasped behind his back.

"I beg your pardon ma'am, would you happen to be Mrs. Nancy Tuckerton?"

"Why yes, yes I am." She said hesitantly in her sweet Virginia accent. "May I ask what this is regarding?" she was nearly choking up, for she already knew the answer.

"Mrs. Tuckerton," he said with a deep breath, "My name is Lieutenant Collins, and it is with the deepest regret that I have to inform you that your husband, Private Tuckerton, has been killed in action. The helicopter he was flying in was gunned down, and he died in the crash."

My mother stood there with a hand over her mouth, tears in her eyes, but holding herself together. I didn't understand how this thin, little woman had the strength inside her to keep from breaking down. A couple of feet behind Lt. Collins stood another soldier. He was just out of view from the spot on the floor my older sister and I had been stacking Lincoln Logs, and he had now approached the entrance to my home. He passed a folded flag to Lt. Collins, who in turn passed it to my mother. She received it with sturdy hands. Lt. Collins and the other soldier bowed their heads, returned to their car, and then drove away from our house.

After what felt like a lifetime, but in reality must have only been a minute or two, my mother had stopped staring down at the flag in her hands and set it upon the head of the table to return to her sink full of dishes. My sister and I stared at each other contemplating if what had just happened was in fact real. We were young and saw that in fact, it was, but since our mother held it together, we somehow managed ourselves.

No one spoke for the rest of the day though, and aside from the silence, everything went on as normal. My sister and I still did our chores, while my mother continued to prepare us all dinner; which we ate, with the flag sitting at the spot reserved for our father.

As I had been lying in my bed, staring up at the ceiling wondering, the silence was finally cut. My mother wailed out in what I recall as the most terrifying scream I have heard in my entire life. My sister and I rushed to her room to see what was wrong. "What happened?! Mom are you okay?!" we shouted in unison.

"Of course I'm not okay," she cried. "There's a hole in our family we can never fill! The rest of my life, I will spend aching, waiting, waiting, waiting..."

III.

I never saw my mother wear the dress with the sunflowers ever again. She's who I thought of, as I received my own home wrecking knock.

"Excuse me, would you happen to be Mrs. Pascal?" the officer asked.

And just like my mother I answered him with the same hesitance in my voice, "I am."

"I hate to be the one to inform you of this, but..." Oh, what trouble is my family in for? What happened, to who? "Your family has been involved in a fatal car crash..."

"What happened?" I demanded from him, not knowing whether anger or sorrow was the more prevalent emotion "Are they okay? Where are they?"

"Your husband and son were... well, they were killed upon impact," he said softly and full of guilt "And as for your daughter, Emily, she was rushed from the scene and in transit to Richfield Hospital; but... she didn't make it. Her lung collapsed while in the ambulance. You would've been contacted sooner, but this all happened roughly thirty-seven minutes ago."

Biting my lip, tears in my eyes; I found myself with my mother's same unwavering hands. "I see..." came out from behind my lips. At this point I think the officer tried to offer his assistance in *any way necessary*, but I could no longer hear him. I was no longer in this world. I shut the door on the still-talking officer and walked up the stairs to the entrance of my attic.

I pulled on the weathered string hanging from the ceiling, and turned on the dim attic light. I could smell the years that had passed by in this place. I walked over to a dusty armoire, pacing each step to the ringing of the grandfather clock down by the living room. Opening the top drawer, I reached all the way to the bottom and pulled out my mother's sunflower dress amidst all the other dated clothes. I sat there, knees bent, leaning upon the armoire for what felt like a lifetime, clutching her dress to my face. After the next set of chimes emanating from the clock, I lifted myself up; I changed into my mother's dress, and walked into my kitchen to finish the dishes.